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Statewide Tourism Awards Presented at Governor's Conference

Jay Robson—Tourism Person of the Year

Fort Benton—Tourism Community of the Year

Lady Cameron Heritage Celebration & PBS Premiere—Tourism Event of the Year

The City of Red Lodge, Community of Cooke City, Friends of the Beartooth All-American Road and the Red Lodge Area Chamber of Commerce—

Tourism Partnership of the Year

Helena, MT – April 28, 2006 – Four statewide tourism award winners were honored for their achievements by the Montana Tourism and Recreation Industry at the 2006 Montana Governor's Conference on Tourism and Recreation held in Great Falls, April 10-11. "I am pleased to see these individuals and organizations recognized for the good work they do" noted Governor Brian Schweitzer, "Their efforts benefit us all and I am grateful for their dedication and hard work on behalf of Montana's tourism industry."

Jay Robson of Dollar-Rent-A-Car received the Tourism Person of the Year Award. Robson has been a tireless advocate on behalf of Montana's tourism industry. Whether he is sharing his extensive knowledge of the industry, brainstorming innovative ways to stretch marketing dollars, testifying in front of the legislature or donating in-kind goods and services, he makes certain it is all done in a manner which brings value to the table for Montana's tourism industry.

In announcing Robson's award, chair of the Governor's Tourism Advisory Council, Mike Scholz of Big Sky noted that "(Jay) has the confidence, trust and respect of his partners in the industry and the ability to bring partnerships together for the greater good." He currently serves on the Missoula Convention and Visitors Bureau Board, Glacier Country Board and Russell Country Board. He is a former member of the Tourism Advisory Council and devotes countless hours to volunteer service in his community.

Fort Benton, known as a small town with a large heritage, was honored as Tourism Community of the Year for doing exceptional work in promoting, preserving and improving their image and visitor resources for the benefit of not only their visitors, but also their residents and Montana as

well. As early as the 1950's, this community began to develop attractions that would appeal to visitors while preserving and interpreting its history and making it a more appealing place to live.

Some of Fort Benton's largest successes from the past year include hosting the Lewis & Clark "Explore the Big Sky" event being the smallest community in the U.S. to be involved in hosting a National Signature Event as well as working in partnership with the Bureau of Land Management, the City of Fort Benton and members of the River and Plains Society to construct, maintain and operate the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument Interpretive Center.

Tourism Event of the Year - the Lady Cameron Heritage Celebration and PBS Premiere which took place in Terry was a celebration of the great works of frontier photographer Evelyn Cameron and a successful fundraiser for her namesake foundation raising over \$18,000.

The Prairie Economic Development Council, the Evelyn Cameron Foundation, the Prairie County Chamber of Commerce, the City of Terry and various other organizations and volunteers organized an event that brought not only an economic infusion to the town of Terry and the surrounding communities of Glendive and Miles City but also provided a learning experience to a vast new audience about frontier life on the plains of eastern Montana in the 19th century while showcasing the unique and scenic landscape of Montana's Plains country.

The Tourism Partnership award was given to the communities and organizations surrounding the Beartooth Highway including the City of Red Lodge, the community of Cooke City, Friends of the Beartooth All-American Road and the Red Lodge Area Chamber of Commerce.

In May 2005, mudslides forced the closure of the Beartooth Highway which is a major tourism draw for the communities surrounding the road. A Red Lodge Chamber survey in June found that businesses were down as much as 28%. However, they made the best of a challenging situation as their nomination read "Because this was such a unique event without precedent, the response by the task force was innovative from day one. They literally invented the process as they went. Ways were found to work with the Montana Department of Transportation, highway contractors, our Congressional delegation, Yellowstone National Park, the Forest Service, the Governor's Office, Yellowstone Country" and a myriad of others. When the resort tax numbers came in later that year, business was down only 11%.

These awards are presented annually to individuals, events, and communities whose efforts to promote or develop Montana's tourism opportunities have preserved or enhanced tourism's role in Montana's economy. A list of previous award winners can be found at: <http://travelmontana.state.mt.us/conference/awards.asp>.

Tourism and recreation is one of Montana's largest industries. In 2005, over 10 million people visited Montana spending \$2.1 billion during their stay. Over 29,000 jobs are directly supported by nonresident travel, resulting in over \$531 million in total personal income for Montana residents.

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